

MACAULAY'S USE OF LITERATURE

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on this kind of evidence. The second question is the one that concerns us at present. Clearly the representation of any class of men in the comic drama as frequently results in the creation of figures which are conventional as of figures which are true to nature. We have only to remember the stage Irishman and the stage sailor to see this. The eccentricities of individuals are attributed to a class, certain characteristics are exaggerated and others are softened or omitted to produce a more striking and amusing character. Take these dramatic personages and generalise from them about the class, if you like : but you are not basing your conclusions on facts and it is no good asserting that you are. You are only copying certain fictions which were accepted as facts by the pit and the gallery; you are building on humorous exaggerations of the facts. Macaulay does this far too much in his description of the country gentlemen and the clergy. The general lines of his pictures are correct enough, but individual features are over-coloured and over-emphasised till the result of the process is a caricature, not a portrait. The judgement which should be passed on his description of the clergy and the country gentlemen is not that he employs a kind of evidence which should not be used in such

an account, but that he does not recognise that its value is limited, and that it should be employed with more caution.

Another striking characteristic of the History is the extent to which its author utilises the evidence afforded by ballads, satires, lampoons, and the occasional verse of the times generally. Trevelyan remarks that 'Macaulay's predilection for the Muse of the street is, indeed, one of the few personal facts about him which up to this time has taken hold of the public imagination. He bought every